

## Message Text

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ACTION INR-07

INFO OCT-01 EA-07 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 ACDA-07

NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 EUR-12 NEA-10 (ISO) W

----- 095211

O R 231101Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2445

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 23673

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: MPOL, XB, XP, UR

SUBJECT: ASSESSMENT OF ASIAN/PACIFIC REGION PRECEPTIONS OF THE  
SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE PACIFIC (NIAM 40/11-1-1-76)

REF: STATE 187556

SUMMARY: THAI ARE GENERALLY UNAWARE OF SOVIET MILITARY  
PRESENCE IN PACIFIC AND CONCENTRATE THEIR STRATEGIC CONCERN  
ON THREAT OF VIETNAMESE EXPANSIONISM. RTG IS, HOWEVER,  
SUSPICIOUS OF SOVIET MOTIVES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA (AND  
ACTIVITIES OF SOVIETS IN THAILAND), AND THAI CAN BE  
EXPECTED TO KEEP A CLOSE WATCH ON SOVIET INFLUENCE OVER  
INDOCHINA STATES. THAI WILL CONTINUE CAUTIOUS ATTEMPTS  
TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH MAJOR COMMUNIST POWERS, BALANCE  
THEM OFF AGAINST EACH OTHER AND RETAIN FRIENDSHIP WITH  
U.S. HOPING THAT WE WILL MAINTAIN OUR FORWARD STRATEGIC  
POSITIONS IN PACIFIC. END SUMMARY.

1. THAI SECURITY CONCERNS LOOK EITHER INWARD AT

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INSURGENT MOVEMENTS OR OUTWARD TOWARD COMMUNIST

NEIGHBORS. POSSIBILITY OF VIETNAMESE EXPANSION-ISM OUTRANKS ANY OTHER THREAT PERCEIVED BY THIS COUNTRY. ALL ELSE, INCLUDING SOVIET ACTIVITIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, IS VIEWED PRIMARILY IN THAT CONTEXT, AND ALTHOUGH ANY INDICATION OF SOVIET INFLUENCE ON VIETNAM'S FUTURE INTENTIONS TOWARDS THAILAND IS OF CONCERN, THE THAI GENERALLY FEEL THAT WHAT THE USSR IS DOING OUTSIDE THAI BORDERS IS SOMETHING OVER WHICH THEY HAVE VIRTUALLY NO CONTROL. THAI AWARENESS OF SOVIET NAVAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PACIFIC IS ALMOST NIL.

2. ROYAL THAI NAVY (RTN) HAS RECEIVED FROM DAO REPORTS OF SOVIET ACTIVITIES TO WHICH THEY HAVE SHOWN INTEREST AND CONCERN, BUT HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO CONVEY THIS CONCERN TO OTHER ELEMENTS OF RTG. RTN COMMITS ITS LIMITED ASSETS TO CONTROLLING SEABED IN GULF O SIAM AND PATROLLING THE MEKONG RIVER. RTN HAS SHOWN PARTICULAR CONCERN ABOUT SOPHISTICATED, SOVIET-SUPPLIED RIVER PATROL BOATS ON THE MEKONG EVEN THOUGH THERE IS NO CONFIRMATION TO THE EXISTENCE OF THOSE CRAFT. THAI COASTAL WATERS OF THE ANDAMAN SEA HAVE IN PAST RECEIVED LITTLE ATTENTION, BUT RTN IS PLANNING NEW ASSETS FOR THIS AREA IN NEW FUTURE. A SMALL NAVAL BASE IS BEING CONSTRUCTED AT BAN THAP MO (8 DEGREE 35'N, 98 DEGREE 14' E), BUT WILL NOT BE OPERATIVE FOR AT LEAST TWO YEARS.

3. OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE THAI MILITARY, GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC ARE LESS AWARE OF SOVIET ACTIVITIES. RECENT STATEMENTS BY AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER FRASER HAVE BROUGHT LIMITED PUBLIC ATTENTION TO DANGER OF SOVIET NAVAL POWER IN BOTH PACIFIC AND INDIAN OCEAN, BUT THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE LOCAL REACTION EITHER TO FRASER PRONOUNCEMENTS OR STATEMENTS BY OTHERS MADE AT RECENT ANZUS MEETING. LOCAL CHINESE PRESS HAS ON OCCASION CARRIED STORIES OF PRC CRITICISM OF US/USSR PRESENCE IN INDIAN OCEAN, AND PRC HAS USED OCCASIONS OF THAI VISITS TO PEKING

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TO LECTURE EXCHANGE PARTICPANTS ON SOVIET MILITARY IMPERIALISM, BUT, AGAIN, SUCH APPEARS TO HAVE LITTLE EFFECT.

4. AT SAME TIME THAI, PARTICULARLY MILITARY AND POLICE, ARE SUSPICIOUS OF SOVIET MOTIVES IN THAILAND AND SPEND MUCH MORE EFFORT MONITORING ACTIVITIES OF SOVIETS THAN OF ANY OTHER EMBASSY STAFF HERE.

RTG SUSPECTS SOVIETS OF SUPPORTING LEFTISTS STUDENTS AND OF GUIDING STUDENTS IN THEIR ATTEMPTS TO INFILTRATE LABOR MOVEMENT. DURING APRIL 1976, ELECTIONS, CONSERVATIVE ELEMENTS OF THAI SOCIETY SPREAD RUMORS (AND OFTEN CONVINCED THEMSELVES) THAT KGB WAS FINANCING SOCIALIST AND NEW FORCE PARTY CANDIDATES. SEVERE DEFEAT OF THESE CANDIDATES INDICATES THAT SUCH CHARGES, AMONG OTHER FACTORS, HAD CONSIDERABLE IMPACT ON ELECTION OUTCOME. OTHER INDICATIONS OF RTG SUSPICIOUSNESS IN DEALING WITH USSR ARE LONG-TIME REFUSAL TO PERMIT SOVIET EMBASSY TO STATION MILITARY ATTACHES HERE (RECENTLY APPROVED) AND REFUSAL TO PERMIT LABOR LEADERS TO VISIT USSR (EXPECTED TO BE GRANTED SOON). THAI ARE PRESENTLY ATTEMPTING TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH COMMUNIST COUNTRIES AND ARE THEREFORE SOFTENING A BIT IN THEIR ATTITUDES, BUT RETAIN A DEEP MISTRUST OF SOVIET AND OTHER COMMUNIST INTENTIONS.

5. SPECULATION ON FUTURE ATTITUDES WOULD INDICATE THAT AS SOVIETS ATTEMPT TO INCREASE INFLUENCE IN THIS AREA, THEY WILL BE WATCHED (PARTICULARLY IN INDONONESIA WHERE THAI ARE CERTAINLY AWARE OF WHAT HAPPENED TO OTHER WESTERN POWERS WHO WERE INVOLVED HERE AND, WHERE POSSIBLE, USED AS A COUNTERPOISE TO BALANCE INFLUENCE OF PRC (AND VICE VERSA). THE THAI WILL CONTINUE TO BE LEERY OF SOVIET INTENTIONS HERE AND WILL PROBABLY REMAIN THE RELUCTANT PARTNER IN THE EXPANSION OF CONTACTS WITH THE SOVIETS WHO HAVE IN THE PAST BEEN THE INITIATORS IN THE RELATIONSHIPS.

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INFO OCT-01 EA-07 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 ACDA-07

NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 EUR-12 NEA-10 (ISO) W

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O R 231101Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2446  
INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA  
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AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY  
AMEMBASSY RANGOON  
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

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6. THAILAND HAS BEEN IN THE PROCESS OF RE-EXAMINING ITS FOREIGN POLICY FOR SEVERAL YEARS, AND HAS BEEN EXPANDING DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH COMMUNIST COUNTRIES. IN LIGHT OF COMMUNIST VICTORIES IN INDOCHINA, AND FACED WITH HOSTILE, AGGRESSIVE NEIGHBORS, THAILAND HAS HARKENED BACK TO ITS TRADITIONAL CAPACITY FOR "BENDING WITH THE WIND" IN ITS ATTEMPT TO PERFORM A DELICATE BALANCING ACT TO AVOID FOREIGN DOMINATION. IT IS LIKELY TO CONTINUE ATTEMPTS TO BE CAUTIOUSLY FRIENDLY WITH THE MAJOR COMMUNIST POWERS WHILE RETAINING ITS FRIENDSHIP FOR, BUT NOT TOO GREAT AN IDENTIFICATION WITH, THE U.S. THAI DECISION EARLIER THIS YEAR TO REQUEST CLOSURE OF U.S. BASES IN THAILAND WAS CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL BY RTG TO PAVE THE WAY FOR IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH COMMUNIST NEIGHBORS. WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. MILITARY COMBAT FORCES NEVERTHELESS REMOVED A CERTAIN FEELING OF SECURITY WHICH OUR PRESENCE HERE REPRESENTED, AND LEADERS IN RTG HAVE PRIVATELY EXPRESSED THEIR DESIRE TO SEE U.S. MAINTAIN ITS FORWARD POSITIONS IN THE PACIFIC.

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7. ROLE PLAYED BY FELLOW ASEAN MEMBERS, WHO ARE MORE AWARE THAN ARE THAI OF SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE AND FREQUENTLY VOICE CONCERN ABOUT BIG POWER UTILIZATION OF STRAITS OF MALACCA, MAY ALSO STIMULATE INCREASED THAI CONCERN ABOUT THAT PRESENCE. AWARENESS WILL NOT, HOWEVER, MUCH INFLUENCE THAILAND'S MILITARY STRUCTURE. THE THAI KNOW THAT THEY CANNOT COMPETE WITH HANOI'S ARMY, FIFTH LARGEST IN THE WORLD, BACKED BY SOVIET-SUPPLIED WEAPONRY, SHOULD THAT CHALLENGE EVER HAVE TO BE FACED.

8. USSR WOULD LIKE TO EXPAND ITS INFLUENCE OVER COMMUNIST PARTY OF THAILAND WHICH IS PRESENTLY MAOIST ORIENTED AND HAS A LARGELY CHINESE OR SINO-THAI LEADERSHIP. PRESENT USSR EFFORTS AIMED AT BANGKOK'S

STUDENT/LABOR MOVEMENT ARE LIKELY TO INCREASE AS  
SOVIETS EXPAND THEIR PRESENCE HERE. STRENGTHEN-  
ING OF ANTI-RTG STUDENT/LABOR MOVEMENT CAN AFFECT  
THAILAND'S NATIONAL VULNERABILITIES, MANY OF WHICH  
RESULT FROM THE COUNTRY'S SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC  
DISPARITIES. THAILAND, AS IT DEVELOPS AN APPRECIATION  
OF THE GROWING SOVIET PRESENCE, HOPEFULLY WILL WORK  
HARDER TOWARDS PUTTING ITS OWN HOUSE IN ORDER.  
IN SUPPORT OF THESE ENDEAVORS, JAPAN SHOULD BE ABLE--  
AND PERHAPS HAS A RESPONSIBILITY--TO PLAY A LARGER  
ROLE IN ASSISTING THAI NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.  
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